



Fragment of the Month: October 2014

Add.6463(e)3416: Breathing the 'dust of centuries'

By Melonie Schmierer-Lee

This letter was written three weeks after Solomon Schechter arrived in Egypt. He writes to Francis Jenkinson, the University Librarian, describing his work in the Genizah chamber and his dealings with the local men who were assisting him. His main purpose, however, is to notify Jenkinson that he plans to send the first batch of manuscripts on ahead, and, as he intends to offer the manuscripts to the Library, would the Library look after them until Schechter's return. The letter was preserved among Jenkinson's papers, and eventually deposited in the University Library itself.

Hotel Metropole

Cairo 12 Jan 97

(c/o Cook's Agency)

Private Dear Mr. Jenkinson,

I am now here since three weeks. After making the ~~aeqai~~ acquaintance of the Chief Rabbi here and the president of the Jewish community I set to work on the "Genizas" where I ~~spent~~ spend the most of my time in the dust of centuries. The beadel & other infernal scoundrels are helping me to clear away the rubbish and the printed matter. I have constantly to bakeshish them, but still they are stealing many good things and sell them to the dealers in ~~an~~ antiquities. I cannot possibly prevent it, but I found out the said dealers and bought from them the fragments which have interest for me. In the Genizah itself which is dark dusty and full of all possible ~~in~~ insects there is no opportunity of

examining the content of MSS. My policy is to take as much as I can (for which I have the full permission of the authorities). I have till now thirteen large ~~sacks~~ bags of fragments, ~~of~~ which though not examined, I am ~~su~~ sure, contain many most important things.

Now I have a great request on you. I do not consider it desirable to the MSS here and am anxious to send the first lot ~~home~~ home to England. Will you ~~receive them~~ give them a place in the University Library till I return. The MSS will probably belong soon to your Library. I want only to hear first whether you and the Syndics will agree to certain conditions which I have to make. Money plays no important part in these conditions and I am sure you will find them very fair and just. But till then I want the MSS to be considered as my private property; so that the boxes must not be opened before I have returned. For I am very anxious to [be] the first to examine them properly. ~~Can~~ If you cannot agree to these condition will you do me the ~~favour~~ favour to send at once - when the boxes ~~to~~ arrive for Mrs Schechter (2 Rock Road) and hand her over the boxes, who will bring them into some place of ~~safe~~ safety till I return p.g.

I repeat again that I do not mean to make a bargain with the University. I have not the least doubt that you will find the terms just and fair. What I am chiefly anxious is that no body would ~~th~~ see the MSS before I have examined them. Therefore I want you to consider them as my private property till then.

I feel fairly well and am rather thankful that it is cold. Otherwise it would be unbearable to live in this dus[t] & underground. How are you? PG I intend to stay here another three weeks as the Jews have here so many feasts and fasts in which I cannot work.

With best regards,
yours very truly

S. Schechter

Hotel Heligopol
(Case 12 Jan 98)
(Off Cooke Agency)

Private

Dear Mr. Jenkins,

I am now here
since three weeks. After making the degree
acquaintance of the shop-knobs here and
the president of the Jewish community
set to work on the "Genizah" where
I spent some of my time
in the sort of costume. He showed me
other important documents who are helping
me to clear away the rubbish and the possible
matter. I hope consistently to be useful here
but still they are stealing many good things
and sell them to the dealers in the market.
I cannot possibly prevent, but I found
out the good dealers and bought from them
the fragments which have interest for
me. In the Genizah itself I think is
worth study and full of all possible
results there is no opportunity of examining

the content of MS. My policy is to take as to receive for Mrs. Schechter (2 Rock
and St. I am (for what I have the full Road) and hand over the books
permission of the authorities). I have told who will bring them into some place
near Boston large rather large of fragments of safe safety till I return p. 1.
of which though not examined, I am sure
sure, contain many most important things. I do not mean to make a bargain
things. Now I have a great request with the University. I have not the
time. I do not consider it desirable least doubt that you will find
to the MS. here and am anxious to send the terms just and fair. What I
thought let home home to England. I am chiefly anxious is that no body
you receive them in the University. I would see the MS. before I have
very little I return. The MS. will be examined them. Therefore I want you
to be looking soon to your library. I consider them as my private
want only to be sure first whether you properly tell them.
and the Syndics will agree to certain conditions which I have to make. They
play no part in these conditions and it is cold. Other wise it would be an
I am sure you will find them very desirable so to learn in this due &
fair and just. But tell them I want underground. How are you? P.S. I
the MS. to be considered as my private want to stay here another three weeks
properly so that the books must not be the Jews have here so many parts
be opened before I have returned. For and parts in which I cannot work.
I am very anxious to be first to examine
them properly. If you cannot agree
to these conditions will you do me the favor
forward to send at once - when the books

With best regards
Yours very truly
S. J. Schechter

Cambridge University Library Add.6463(e)3416: Solomon Schechter's letter to Francis
Jenkinson, University Librarian

Contact us: genizah@lib.cam.ac.uk

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